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## BOOK REVIEWS.

## THE MEETING OF EXTREMES IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY.

By Bernard Bosanquet, Fellow of the British Academy. London: Macmillan & Co., 1921. Pp. xxviii, 220. Price, 8s. 6d. net.

The productivity of Dr. Bosanquet is astonishing; some may even think that he works a little too rapidly. Perhaps it may be conceded that there is some tendency to sketchiness in his treatment of great subjects and an occasional elusiveness in his style; but one cannot but wonder at the extent of his knowledge, the comprehensiveness of his surveys, the many-sidedness of his appreciations, and the calm and tolerant spirit with which he regards the widely divergent modes of thought with which he deals. In the present work he is concerned with various recent types of Idealism and Realism. Like a good many others now, he does not care to describe his own philosophical attitude by either of these highly ambiguous terms; and his main object in the present work is to show that extreme interpretations of either side of the antithesis tend to lead to similar misconceptions. Most of what he has to say about this lies somewhat outside of the province of this JOURNAL; but he makes some references to ethics that have a good deal of interest. It may be well to quote the most important passage (pp. 186-7).

He begins with the following extract from Professor Hoernle's recent work on *Neo-Realism and Religion*—" [Neo-realism] shares the belief in the perfectibility of the world ('Meliorism') with the Pragmatism of James and the Instrumentalism of Dewey. In eliminating from religion all supernatural elements and identifying it with the hope of and the endeavour for a more glorious future for mankind, it presents the same marriage of Naturalism and Philanthropy which was characteristic already of Comte and Mill and the 'religion of humanity.' "

"Everywhere, in fact," Dr. Bosanquet proceeds, "we have a popular movement as of the ethical societies. And this I take for an important symptom. Those who have had actively to do with institutions of this type know how simple and how attractive their attitude to life can be made to appear. You admit that there is duty and happiness, and a world to be made better, it is

not necessary to decide how far—and, *voilà tout*. All can co-operate, all can sympathise, up to a certain point. And I call their frequency and the general appeal of the moralistic attitude an important symptom of the one-sidedness of the spirit it represents, because, as Professor Alexander's acute insight informs him, it does not supply a really adequate solution of the problem. The passions for nature, or beauty, or morality, or truth 'may be happiness enough in the lives of some and serve them in place of religion, but they are not the religious passion and only simulate it.' It seems to me quite plain that this verdict covers the whole of the neo-realistic and neo-idealistic pretensions to a religious attitude, excepting, so far as we have seen that it recognises the special relevant experience and its speculative foundation, Professor Alexander's own. The point is that for the ethical attitude man's perfectibility is taken as realised in the unending series of events. This is an obvious contradiction, which no conception of endless approximation is able to remove."

It will be remembered that some remarks of a similar kind are to be found in Dr. Bosanquet's earlier book, "Some Suggestions in Ethics." It will be remembered also that in his other recent book, "What Religion is," he has given a very striking exposition of his own conception of the religious attitude. Members of ethical societies can hardly fail to be impressed by such statements from one who was for many years the first chairman of the committee of the first ethical society in England, and also by the statement that he quotes from Professor Alexander (*Space, Time and Deity*, Vol. II, p. 407), who was one of the most valued lecturers in the same society. Perhaps there is some exaggeration in the criticisms that have been directed against such societies, especially as referring to that particular society; for I believe most of the leading representatives of that society (including, no doubt, Dr. Bosanquet and Professor Alexander themselves) were well aware that the ethical attitude by itself is not a satisfactory substitute for religion. But it is, of course, true that the last quarter of the 19th century, during which most of the ethical societies grew up and flourished, was a time of metaphysical agnosticism. This attitude began somewhat earlier in Germany. Matthew Arnold's saying about Goethe's conviction—"Art still has truth, take refuge there,"—only half true for Goethe, could never have had much acceptance in England. Its English equivalent was "Morality still has truth, take refuge there."

This was preached by Matthew Arnold himself, as well as by Carlyle and Ruskin and many others, and it resulted in the very remarkable stream of ethical writings that appeared in England at the end of the century. The new century has taken on a somewhat different colour, partly in consequence of the deeper agnosticism that has been directed against morality itself by such writers as Nietzsche, Samuel Butler, and many others, and partly by the development of more constructive theories of metaphysics. Dr. Bosanquet and Professor Alexander have certainly been among the greatest architects of such new constructions; and they have earned the right to criticise those laggards who have not been able to advance along with them.

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MORAL THEORY: an Introduction to Ethics. By G. C. Field.  
London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1921. Pp. x, 214. Price,  
6s. net.

Within its self-imposed limitations—it is an introduction to Ethics as opposed to a manual—Mr. Field has written a stimulating criticism. To begin with, the ethical theories of Kant and Aristotle are criticised, as represented in the *Ethics* and the *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals*. He finds Aristotle wanting in his final exaltation of the life of contemplation to the position of the supreme end; and Kant's view vitiated by a fundamental fallacy in the false assumptions from which he starts. He starts (as Mr. Field puts it) from the assumption that what is good must be good in itself, apart from all relations to anything else. And in consequence of this he is forced to assume that the mere intellectual apprehension of the moral fact is sufficient to move us to action. But we must maintain against this that the simple intellectual apprehension, the bare knowledge of anything can never move us to action. And consequently the idea of a good in itself is incompatible with one of the most deeply recognised characteristics of the moral fact, namely, that it is somehow a reason for action. There follows an acute analysis of the Kantian fallacy in other forms, as exemplified in Mr. G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* (p. 52). The latter part of the book is occupied by an attempt to see whether it would not be possible to arrive at a satisfactory result by a modification and development of the theory of Aristotle.